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## Speak up & be heard

CONSUMER REGISTER lists summaries of major consumer proposals before Federal agencies. If you wish to submit written comments, include your name & address, state the name & *Federal Register* citation of the proposal on which you are commenting and explain your views briefly & clearly.

## Nutrition labeling

An order clarifying a **Food & Drug Administration** (FDA) regulation on nutrition labeling became effective June 20.

The regulations specify that the following nutrition information should appear on labels: serving size, servings per container, caloric content, protein content, carbohydrate content, fat content & percentage of Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA) for protein, vitamins & minerals.

While nutrition labeling regulations are for the most part voluntary, they become mandatory in cases where a manufacturer makes nutritional claims for a product or where vitamin, mineral or protein is added to the product.

Questions have been raised about a paragraph in the regulations referring to certain situations where a manufacturer offers to provide additional nutrition information beyond that specified in the regulations or where a consumer asks a manufacturer for such additional nutrition information. Examples might be inquiries concerning the product's fiber content or moisture content.

At issue is whether the offer or the furnishing of such additional information would require the manufacturer to conform to FDA's nutrition labeling regulations on a mandatory basis.

The agency's answer is that it did not intend to set up such a requirement. FDA does not wish to interfere in any way with the consumer's access to additional information.

To avoid confusion created by this paragraph, FDA's order amends the wording of the paragraph.

Details—*Federal Register:* June 20, page 16044; March 14, page 6959; Jan. 19, page 2124; CONSUMER NEWS: Feb. 1.

## Meatballs

Sept. 14 is deadline for comments on **Agriculture Dept.'s** proposal to provide a separate standard for meatballs.

Under the proposal, meatballs would be composed as follows:

- At least 65% skinless & boneless skeletal meat (based on total weight of the product) that contains no more than 30% fat. If the meatballs are to be partially or completely cooked, the composition of the raw mix would be used to determine compliance with the standard.
- Not more than 8% of optional liquid ingredients, such as water, milk, broth or tomato juice (based on total weight of the formula).
- Up to 12%—alone or in any combination—of the following ingredients, which give meatballs their typical texture: bread, crackers, crumbs, cereals, milk powder & soy flour (percentage computed on total formula weight); additional food materials, which give meatballs distinctive flavor, could be included, such as spice, eggs, cheese, peppers, onions, mushrooms, sugar & other seasonings.

Products labeled "swedish style meatballs" & "meat & cheese balls" would have to comply with the provisions set forth for regular meatballs, but could contain additional ingredients necessary for the proper preparation of these specialty items.

Present requirements cover only "spaghetti with meatballs in sauce" & "spaghetti with meat sauce," which call for at least 12% meatballs in which no more than 12% extenders (such as cereal or crumbs) can be used. The liquid ingredients are not limited in quantity.

The proposed regulation would apply to frozen, canned or fresh meatballs made in processing plants that deal in interstate commerce. It does not apply to meatballs prepared & served in local restaurants.

Details—*Federal Register:* July 13, page 11683. Send comments to Hearing Clerk, Agriculture Dept., Washington, DC 20250.

## Suppositories

On July 23 **Food & Drug Administration** (FDA) withdrew its approval for suppositories containing aminophylline with pentobarbital & benzocaine. Those suppositories had been available only by prescription.

FDA withdrew its approval of this aminophylline because of lack of evidence that it can aid asthma sufferers.

Consumers interested in whether a specific product is covered by this FDA action should send inquiries to Food & Drug Administration, Bureau of Drugs, Office of Compliance (BD-300), 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852.

Details—*Federal Register:* July 13, page 18702.

## Fish protein concentrate

On July 24 **Food & Drug Administration** (FDA) amended its regulations to permit the use of whole fish protein concentrate in manufactured food products & to add a species of anchovy to the kinds of fish previously allowed in the preparation of fish concentrate.

In 1967 FDA determined that properly processed whole fish protein concentrate was a safe food supplement. It restricted packaging to one pound or less for consumer use.

Here are highlights of the amended regulations:

- Packages for consumers must continue to be labeled "whole fish protein concentrate" just as required for

the recently authorized bulk containers.

- Labeling on containers must describe limitations on the use of the additive: Children under 8 years of age should not regularly consume more than 20 grams of the product a day—about a heaping tablespoonful. (Fish concentrate contains flouride, & excessive quantities can damage children's teeth.) When the fish protein concentrate is added to manufactured food products, this food may contain only 8 parts of fluoride per million based on the dry weight of the food product.
- When the additive is used in manufactured food, the ingredient statement must contain the words "whole fish protein concentrate" in the proper order of predominance.

Since the species of fish allowed in the concentrate are deep ocean fish with low mercury levels, FDA says there is little danger of mercury poisoning.

FDA says that although this protein additive has not been used extensively in the U.S., it is popular in some foreign countries. In view of the current soybean shortage, it is likely that the concentrate will be used more in American food.

Consumers who feel they will be adversely affected by these amendments may file objections with FDA before Aug. 23.

Details—*Federal Register:* July 24, page 19815. Send objections to Hearing Clerk, Health, Education & Welfare Dept., 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852.

## Canned leafy greens

**Agriculture Dept.** is revising its standards for canned leafy greens effective Sept. 1.

Agriculture did not receive any comments on its April 13 proposal to revise the standards.

The amendment provides descriptions of defects—such as coarse fibrous stems—in the characteristics of canned leafy greens that were not noticeable in the product when the current standard went into effect in May 1971.

Details—*Federal Register:* July 26, page 19957; April 13, page 9302. CONSUMER REGISTER: June 1.

## Truth in lending

Beginning Jan. 1, 1974, **Federal Reserve System** (FRS) wil require creditors to tell consumers before a credit agreement is signed if finance charge refunds, or rebates, will not be given in cases where consumers repay creditors before the deadline in the credit contract. Creditors will have to provide the information on the Truth in Lending disclosure form.

FRS gives this example of the new refund policy: If the cash price of an item is $100 & the finance charge for a year is $20, the consumer normally will sign an obligation to pay $120 over a year in 12 monthly installments of $10 each. If the consumer repays the obligation in full before the maturity deadline, he may or may not receive a refund on a portion of the $20 finance charge. That decision is made by the creditor. If the creditor will not make a refund, he must tell the consumer before the obligation is signed.

FRS already requires creditors who do make refunds to explain to consumers the method of the refund.

Details—*Federal Register:* July 24, page 19814.